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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0226  
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE 4421  
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI IMMEDIATE 0219  
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE IMMEDIATE 3024  
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN IMMEDIATE 9366  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/01/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [GG](#) [RS](#) [IT](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA/RUSSIA: ITALIANS PREFER DISCUSSING  
GEORGIA/RUSSIA ISSUES IN MULTILATERAL FORA

REF: STATE 40673

Classified By: Jonathan R. Cohen, Acting Political Minister Counselor,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Poloff delivered reftel points to Marco Clemente, MFA Office Director for Russia and CIS affairs. Clemente agreed that Russia's Presidential Instructions on relations with Abkhazia represented a creeping annexation of the separatist region and stated that Italy was concerned by rising tensions in the region. Despite Italy's "special relationship" with Russia, however, Clemente said the GOI believed a common approach toward Russia by the EU, like-minded countries in the OSCE, and the UN would be more effective in convincing Russia to refrain from further provocative moves. Nevertheless, Clemente said that Italy would raise the issue in future bilateral meetings with Russian officials.

12. (C) Clemente noted that Russia was responding to the Trans-Atlantic community crossing redlines that Russia had communicated clearly in the past year - recognition of Kosovo and discussion of MAP for Ukraine and Georgia before the NATO Bucharest Summit. Italy had expected some sort of Russian reaction. While the GOI was unhappy about recent developments in Georgia, the GOI saw Russia as a mostly restrained and mostly responsible interlocutor given the range of options Russia possessed.

3, (C) Comment: Despite Clemente's assurances that they would press Russia for more responsible behavior in Georgia, Italy is not likely to press very hard. Italy believes it has a special relationship with Russia and that it can best influence Moscow by avoiding friction in that relationship. We have yet to see Italy's coziness produce any noticeable effect on Russian policy.  
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